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THE STRATEGY of the CHURCH IN THE CRISIS OF THE WORLD

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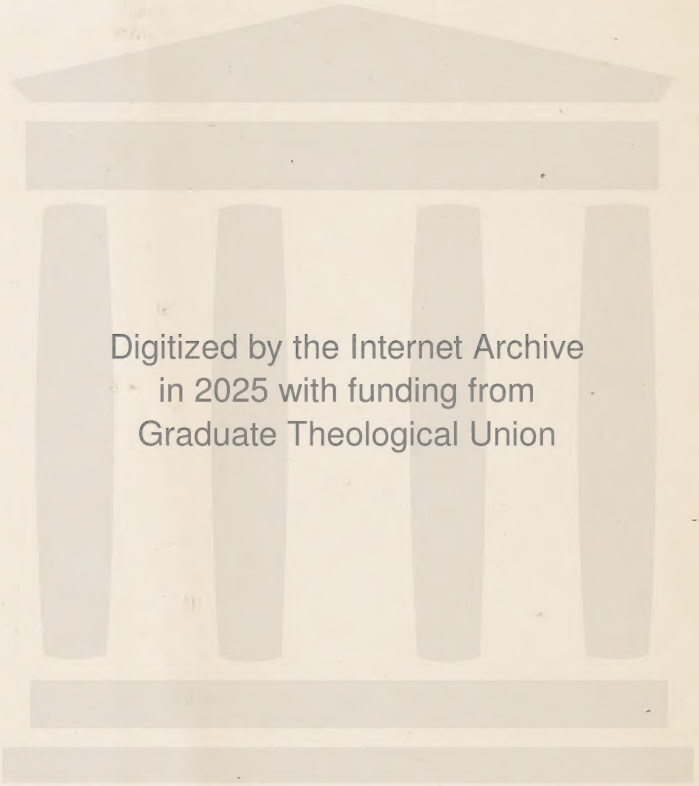
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THE STRATEGY OF THE CHURCH IN THE CRISIS OF THE WORLD

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What then shall one answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and in her shall the afflicted of his people take refuge. — Isaiah 14 : 32.

What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. — John 6 : 28, 29.

The early chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah read like a tract for our times. Then, as now, a mighty empire terrorized the world. To the lesser nations living under the menace of the black cloud of war, never knowing when it might break in destructive fury upon their heads, the prophet utters a series of oracles. These are gathered by the greatest of interpreters around three texts. Each is a picture. The first represents the peoples like the sea lashed by a furious tempest. The second depicts Zion as a rock unmoved amidst the storm and on the rock a beacon light, while in the third a new continent is marvelously rising out of the waters about the rock giving fresh foothold for despairing humanity.

If these words had been written for this hour, they could not more trenchantly suggest the strategy of the church for the crisis of today. They are a challenge to our faith — amid war-swept humanity the church a rock of refuge, bearing the light of the world, while around it emerges the new age of hope and faith, of liberty and love. The first essential of the strategy of the church is faith in its resources and confidence in its glorious commission to save the world.

How profoundly the desperate need reinforces the prophet's challenge! The world has seemed rich and self-sufficient. But in this golden age of the twentieth century, commanding vast new physical resources which by all human logic should add mightily to its power, it finds itself plunged in darkness and deluged in tears and blood. The world, the prosperous world, the proud world is seen to be what Jesus Christ tells us it is, a world in desperate need. Who doubts today that it needs to be saved?

How shall it be saved? Not by force. The law of the despot, that might makes right, in dimensions never seen before, has been weighed and found wanting. And political statecraft and all imaginable secret intrigue, with the assumption that the state is superior to the moral law, has been weighed and found wanting. And human absolutism, the blood of kings guarded as a precious treasure and their right to rule called divine, has been weighed and found wanting. And science, often exalted as supreme, has yielded itself as the ally of destruction and, in and of itself, has been weighed and found wanting. And international law, neutralizing a little kingdom lying between two great nations that forever it might be a bulwark against war, has been weighed and found wanting. And religion with a private mark upon it, domesticating God and in his name planning campaigns of cruelty, has been weighed and found wanting.

What must we do that we may work the works of God? Christ answers, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." That is, the crisis takes us back to restate for our faith the program of Jesus as the only adequate basis for the life of the world, and to note how these days of ours prove afresh that its postulates must be the foundation of the new age, since only in them may men live in freedom and in peace. The most effective strategy is to exalt them in their supreme significance. Let us, in brief terms, remind ourselves what they are as Christ wrote them in letters of light on the background of a world in need.

I. The Conception of the Character of God.

We accept "Mr. Britling's" conclusion, "Unless you find God and are found by God you begin at no beginning and you work to no end," and the later suggestion of Mr. Wells that the world moves toward a day when there shall be no kings, nor princes, but one great state and God over all. But we must take a long step beyond that. It is not enough to find someone whom we call God. We are compelled to ask, who is the God whom you have found? In the presence of a world torn and broken by powers that call themselves

Christian, one must ask whether the conception of God has really been Christianized. As George Adam Smith points out, "It is not safe for men to exalt a deity to the throne until they are certified of his character. The vision of mere power intoxicates and brutalizes, no less when it is hallowed by the name of religion, than when it is blindly interpreted as physical force. The chief thing for individuals, as for nations, is not to believe that God reigneth so much as to know what kind of God he is who reigneth."

And if we leap to the definition of God as love, it is pertinent in the present crisis to ask whether we have really understood what love is. Some seem to identify it with dove-like passiveness before the challenge of truth and honor; a meek submission to attack upon our freedom. But love of the good must be weak and insincere unless it carries with it hate of the evil. Such hatred is not devilish but divine. If a man loses capacity for righteous indignation he surrenders virile manhood. If God is incapable of wrath against evil he is unworthy of our worship. Retribution for defiance of love is indelibly imprinted on the moral law, on the constitution of man, on the history of the world, never more evident than in the chapter now being written.

The militarist who trusts in loveless force has snapped his finger at the benevolent philosopher who claims that love is the greatest thing in the world, but he forgets that force is never so powerful as when it is used by the hands of love, and if God is love, and in the end only that which is God-like can survive, then whatever is apart from love is doomed. Our God, the God who is love, is a consuming fire. Jesus himself blazes with wrath at the violations of love and invokes upon them the eternal flame. As that noble leader whom we all delight to honor here (Dr. Gladden), wrote in the day of his young manhood, so may each of us affirm, confident in the power of the God of love:

> "Fierce though the fiends may fight
> And long though the angels hide,
> I know that Truth and Right
> Have the universe on their side."

II. The Conception of the Nature of Man.

Through the centuries Christ has been trying to teach men that love, the only key to the divine character, is alone able to unlock the door of the human soul and to reveal its priceless value. Wars to the death must continue until mankind are willing to accept that truth. But they have never accepted it. On a thousand fields men have been compelled to defend their birthright. And the fight must go on until, scourged by the failure to obey the teaching of Jesus, the nations learn that this age-long war against man's inalienable gift of freedom is utterly wrong and unite to end it.

Four-fifths of the world awakening to the fact that our boasted civilization has been only a thin veneer over murderous greed, that still the instinct of the beast rages in human nature, is now in arms to make liberty secure. We are determined that no longer shall the international highways be like the Jericho road, infested with robbers; that every nation, however small and weak, shall have the right to live its own life in peace. Heroic Belgium made that clear forever.

And if the world is made safe for the weaker nation, so shall it be made safe for the weaker man. Sociologists deplored the war as setting back their anticipated victories, but God is making the wrath of man to praise him. The man on horseback has been superseded. The common man is coming to his own. He is taken out of his obscurity and put, so to speak, in the centre of the universe. He is told that the issue depends on him. He is never going back again to his old life. He has a new sense of his stature. He is coming to a new day of liberty and power.

We often sing,

> "When wilt thou save the people?
> O God of mercy, when?
> Not kings and lords, but nations,
> Not thrones and crowns, but men!"

and we are living to see our question answered.

III. The Conception of the Goal of Humanity.

The world has thought of Christ's vision of the kingdom of light and of love as a counsel of perfection. But however the centuries may roll before that kingdom is fully realized, the spirit of it is dictating the covenants of the nations. Into the minds of men is creeping what Matheson calls "The cosmopolitan consciousness of Jesus." Nearly twenty years ago he wrote, "The vision of the cross in high places had never yet been seen. Nowhere had an empire wakened to the conviction that it was a servant for the common weal. And Jesus said that without such a waking there could be nothing but national tribulations."

Even America needed to learn that sign of the Son of man. Up to this day priding herself upon her isolation, keeping it among her sacred words that she was not to participate in international alliances, she is now in that league which is seeking to bring on earth the larger brotherhood of nations. She can never go back into her condition of isolated neutrality even if she wished to do so, and she ought not if she could. The vision clears. We know more certainly than we ever knew before that every race has its contribution to make to the welfare of mankind. Underlying all the anguish of these days the man who believes in the kingdom is buoyed up as by a tidal wave of joy as he sees the signs of that coming kingdom.

"Watchman! What of the night?

* * * * * *

— Beyond the war-clouds and the reddened ways,
I see the Promise of the Coming Days!
I see His Sun arise, new-charged with grace
Earth's tears to dry and all her woes efface!
Christ lives! Christ loves! Christ rules!
No more shall Might,
Though leagued with all the Forces of the Night,
Ride over Right. No more shall Wrong
The world's gross agonies prolong.
Who waits His Time shall surely see
The triumph of His Constancy;
When, without let, or bar, or stay,
The coming of His Perfect Day

Shall sweep the Powers of Night away; —
And Faith, replumed for nobler flight,
And Hope, aglow with radiance bright,
And Love, in loveliness bedight,
SHALL GREET THE MORNING LIGHT!"

But in giving herself to the exaltation of these postulates of Jesus, what should be the spirit and method of the church in this present crisis?

Let the Church Search Her Own Soul in Penitence and Confession.

We who are here gathered love the church beyond all words. Our hope and faith have come to us out of the fountains of her life. It is in love that we bid her search her heart. In that spirit we ask, how far the dullness of the world in comprehending God, revealed in Christ, is due to the dimness of her vision of him? If she had given of her men and means for the promotion of the program of her Master any considerable proportion of what she is now giving for the war, would not these present bitter losses have been prevented? The serious matter, as Oldham puts it, "Is not that the state of the world has proved to be so bad, but that the Christian witness has been so feeble."

Why is it that so often the church has impressed men as being "unlike Christ"? Is it wholly because their eyesight has not been clear? Has she borne witness in her own inner life in an adequate degree to the glorious terms now written on our national banner, liberty and justice and democracy? Has she ever allowed the custom of the world to limit the freedom of her speech? Has she ever so exalted the traditions of the past that they have shut out the sunlight of the greater day? Has democracy ruled her polity and her practice? Has she carried over into her fellowship the social distinctions of the outer world so that in her sanctuary the poor man felt his poverty, and special privilege was accorded the man with the gold ring and the fine clothing? Has she courted alliances with any power tainted with the law that might makes right? Has she been complacent over the fact that there are

submarines in the ocean of trade sinking innocent craft without warning and Zeppelins in the realm of high finance dropping bombs upon unsuspecting women and children? Has it been possible for men indifferent to social obligations to listen to her message and hear nothing which stung the slumbering conscience into life?

In the present exposure of human "frightfulness" the main thing is not the sinner but the sin. Is the rest of the world exempt from the evil which has brought forth such bitter fruits? As Tagore puts it,

"Whom do you blame, brothers? Bow your heads down!
The sin has been yours and ours.
The heat growing in the heart of God for ages —
The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong,
the greed of fat prosperity, the rancour of the deprived,
pride of race, and insult to man —
Has burst God's peace, raging in storm."

Let the Church Throw Her Power into the Holy Cause now at Stake.

Let her thank God that she has lived to see the day when the President of the United States "dipped his pen in the sunlight" and while the world rang with a new note of freedom applied to our country the Christian principle, "None of us liveth to himself," and sent her forth to forget herself in order to save the world.

Let her realize that the standard of America is baptized in the spirit of the program of Jesus. "We have no selfish ends to serve; we desire no conquest. We seek no indemnities for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We shall be satisfied when the rights of mankind have been made as secure as the faith and freedom of the nations can make them."

Let her send her sons — pure-souled, high-minded, trained from earliest childhood in the Christian conception of God and of man, where such men count for most. We have shivered with horror over the temptations of the troops. And well we may. We have called on the church to make sure that their souls had as great care as their bodies, and God help

us to follow up that call incessantly; but we ought to add, in no less earnest terms, confidence in these boys, blood of our blood, bone of our bone, who, clad in the armor of God, will go through the war, unscathed by these assaults of the devil. Christ has no nobler soldiers in all the far-flung battle-line of the Kingdom. As Nehemiah Boynton, par excellence a man among men, wrote me the other day from his khaki tent at Fort Hamilton, "I thought I knew men, but I am learning new lessons every day." From the nearly fourscore who have gone out from our own fellowship in Montclair, I am getting such words of Christian hope and faith as I have never had in greater degree from any other source. They form a fresh chapter in Christian evidences. Thank God we may send such men to the front to carry by their lives the message of their Lord.

Let the church magnify to the last degree the ministry of comfort for those at home. Let her make herself more than ever "the house by the side of the road" where abide those who seek by all friendly offices to help one another and the world. As in the elder days one pursued by the enemy could flee to the altar from which the pursuer dared not tear him, so in these days let troubled hearts find the house of prayer the refuge from their fears; there let brave souls renew their courage so that passing through the valley of bitterness they find it transformed into a place of over-flowing springs.

Again let the voice of the church be heard in holding our country and her allies to the noble idealism which they have taken as their objective. Let us remind ourselves that often we have failed to understand how much these ideals demand of us and make sure that with an open mind we go forward under the larger heavens that are so soon to arch over our heads and that we are ready to make those new definitions of liberty and justice and democracy which that wide horizon will compel.

Let the church earnestly maintain the ideals of the civic and social life while the stress of war conditions tempts men to abate their loyalty and minimize the result. For example, in the name of our great war philanthropies there have been

given in succession over our country certain Sunday athletic exhibits tending to break down the Christian observance of the Lord's Day. Under the impulse to help a noble cause the announcement of such an exhibition was made for last Sunday in my own city, covering the entire day and without thought of its deeper implication. The instant protest by the ministers was met by the assurance that the program would be carried out, but when prompt and vigorous action, couched in courteous terms, was taken by the churches and it was realized how deeply the Christian people of the community were grieved, the appointment was cancelled. Let the church be alert, not in puritanical narrow-mindedness but with Christian vision, lest we find ourselves at the war's end with our ideals shattered and the foundations of our Christian civilization undermined.

And again let the church take the lead in preparing the way for the peace of forgiveness. We feel, and justly, that unmeasured wrongs have been done us. How shall we treat them in the hour of victory? Are we to keep the blood-lust of the old Indian tribes or the vengeful spirit of the feuds of the Kentucky Mountains? Let us remember the word, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord." Just as I was leaving home — following a notable gathering of our women, where I had been speaking briefly — a member of the church, American born but of German parentage, came to my office with the tears streaming down her face to wring my hand and speak a word from the depths of her soul. While her frame shook with her sobs, she said: "I was born here, but I am deeply attached to the home of my people. Germany has had everything, but she is not the land my father and my mother loved. She has been untrue to her trust, but the dross will be burned away and the pure gold will remain." We share her faith and therefore, as the awfulness of the war burns its way the further into our consciousness, we sturdily refuse to adopt the evil methods of our foe, to answer hate with hate, to call for reprisals visiting like with like, that when, at last, the Council Board shall meet to negotiate peace, Christ shall preside there. Only so can the wounds be healed.

Let the Church Make Sure that Her Message Rings with Reality.

The greatest power of Christianity is that it is true. It conforms to the facts. If it ever seems to be remote, it is because its essence has not been made manifest, or has been misunderstood. We are told that the church often stands between the man and the Master. Is it true? We were told a generation ago by Carlyle that though the speaking man had no one to compare with him in influence, he had wandered terribly from the point and needed to take the old spectacles off his nose and discover what the real Satan and soul-devouring, world-devouring devil now is. This world crisis strips away unreality, lays bare the unsatisfying nature of any religion which you need to go to the temple to find; calls men to make all outward religious expression measure up to the quality of what "A Student in Arms" calls the "inarticulate religion" of service and sacrifice.

Let me put this in the concrete. Our soprano soloist, a noble-hearted woman with the power to sway great assemblies by the gift of her song, went across the sea this summer to minister by her gift among the troops. We see her one Sunday in a large convalescent camp in England. A chaplain is coming for a service. The men dread it for they feel his message lacks reality to them. One of them boasts that he has become an atheist. The chaplain comes, delivers his pitiful word, which only serves to arouse the antagonism of the men. When he has gone, they crowd around her asking her to sing to them some of the dear old hymns; and so she sings. She had, I think, never spoken a word in public before, but suddenly she finds herself, without premeditation, ceasing her songs and beginning to talk of the Christian life, saying, "I know nothing of the technique of theology; there are many things about religion of which I am ignorant and of which it would be well if I had knowledge, but of one thing I am sure, the heart of Christian faith is true; no man can lead the right life without a great example. If you can tell me of any one more worthy to follow than Jesus Christ I will follow him. He came to live for you in the very spirit in which you

seek to live for one another and your country." She ends her simple words amid deep feeling and then asks, "Shall I sing again?" When the man who had boasted he was an atheist looked up with tears in his eyes, saying: "Sing, 'Nearer my God to Thee.'" The real word found his heart. And as they sang, she afterwards wrote, "I think we felt there was Someone else with us."

O brethren, does our word ring with the reality of the living Christ? Does any one lose the way to him in the elaboration of our creeds or the conventionality of our services? Do we make it clear that our religion is not a thing of words but of personal faith in him, friendship with him, the holy purpose to grow in his likeness, to reincarnate his spirit and to bring on his Kingdom?

"Not what but WHOM I do believe,

. . . . . .

Not what but WHOM!
For Christ is more than all the creeds,
And his full life of gentle deeds
Shall all the creeds outlive.

. . . . . .

Not what I do believe,
BUT WHOM!
Not what,
But WHOM!"

Let the Church Lead the World to Think in the Terms of Humanity.

Men have been thinking in the terms of the nation. Now they are coming to see the truth, "above all nations is humanity," and they are trying to use a new faculty, the international mind. But they need to be educated before they can accept for themselves the words of Edith Cavell as she went to her martyrdom, "I see now that patriotism is not enough; I must die without hatred or bitterness toward any one."

What a field for the church! Its missions have taught it the alphabet of the new language. They are truly called a "campaign for international good will." Their value in

disarming national prejudice, avoiding international complications, weaving international friendships is simply beyond estimate. Their volume must be made more ample that we may lead the nations in that knowledge of one another, that love for one another which shall prepare the way for the new age.

But if the church is to ask the world to cultivate the international mind let us beware lest men point at her the finger of scorn and say, " Physician heal thyself! Make your religion large enough to bear witness to your exhortation. Think no longer in terms of sect but of the kingdom." The world rings with a new sense of international federation. We are making leagues that bind the nations heart to heart for the end of war and the enforcement of peace. Men of widely variant races are drawn together by mighty cords and forget differences in union for a great common end. Shall the church lag behind? Shall not the mighty objective silence the quibble over minor differences?

Further, as we are saying that each nation must be allowed to live its own life, not only for its own sake, but for what it has to bring to the life of humanity — so may we understand that Christian unity is to come, as was said long ago, by " the principle of comprehension rather than that of compromise, or exclusion, or absorption." Let us ask, with Huntington, of the various families of the faith, not " of how much are you willing to bereave yourselves for harmony's sake, but of how much stand you possessed which you consider worth contributing to the common fund?"

Let the Church Live in the Spirit of the Cross.

We have called the day of the early Christian church the great age of the martyrs. But it is now superseded. The world is ringing today as it never rang before with their challenge. Never did humanity seem so divine. Men and women who had been content to squeeze the juice out of life for their own delectation, have given themselves to save the world.

Coningsby Dawson writes from the front, "Men wear the crown of thorns as though it were a cap-and-bells." Hankey cries, "I have seen with the eyes of God. I have seen the vanity of the temporal, and the glory of the eternal; I have despised comfort and honored pain; I have understood the victory of the cross. O death, where is thy sting?" Alan Seeger, that royal young American enrolled in the foreign legion at the first onset of the war, writes,

> "I have a rendezvous with death
> On some scarred slope of battered hill
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And I to my pledged word am true
> I shall not fail that rendezvous."

Can the church lead an age of martyrs? She can if the spirit of the cross rules her life. She will not, she cannot, fail. Yonder from massacred Armenia comes a witness. Look into her face and sit at her feet and believe the world is full of such as she. She is the daughter of a minister, highly respected in her town. The Turks have tried every means their ingenuity could devise to persuade her to become a Moslem. Her husband is dead, her children scattered, one little boy alone remains. They threaten to take him from her, taunting her, "You will become a Moslem now. You will not leave this fine little boy." When this martyr of today taking her son by the hand replied, "I love my child, but I love Christ more. I give him not to you but to God."

How near that is! It is not in Turkey only. It is here. How many a mother has bidden her son farewell, as he sets his face toward perils which no man can measure, repeating in her heart, "I love my son, but I may not keep him for myself; I give him to God for the world's sake and for Christ's sake."

How shall we best celebrate the Pilgrim Tercentenary? By heeding the call of the blood. We have been rereading the story of our origin. How near to us seem the days of Scrooby and Leyden and Plymouth! We see the Pilgrim leaving home and fatherland to make his way to the untamed wilderness, challenging us to be true to our heritage and play the man.

As he crossed the sea that he might have the freedom of his faith, so he calls us once more to cross the sea, more deadly in its peril than when the little *Mayflower* was buffeted by the storm, that in that far land where the battle rages we may strike a blow with all our power to save the gift of freedom, and that he may not have died in vain.

As we hear his challenge we reply:

"God, who gavest men eyes
To see a dream;
God, who gavest men heart
To follow the Gleam;
God, who gavest men stars
To find heaven by;
God, who madest men glad
At need to die;
Lord, from the hills again
We hear thy drum!
God, who lovest free men,
God, who lovest free men,
God, who lovest free men,
Lead on! We come."